

Bangladeshi community vibrant

BY LEEMA FARHA

IN A recent article by Roopa Rakshit (published on July 14 and titled, 'Eid Al-Adha Inspires Love, Unity and Solidarity'), a vivid portrayal of the growing Bangladeshi community in Thunder Bay was made. I am a proud member of this vibrant and prolific community.

From the time I arrived in Canada, and even now, I am often asked "are you from India, or Pakistan?" I gently inform them that I am from Bangladesh — officially, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, a relatively small country in southern Asia by the Ganges River delta on the Bay of Bengal. And, of course, it is not intended that one is not aware of Bangladesh, the wonderful Bangladeshi communities and their contributions across Canada. As a Bangladeshi, theonus lies on me too.

I need to showcase our dynamic community. I am taking this opportunity to tell you about my beloved motherland, Bangladesh.

Before 1947, Bangladesh was part of the Indian subcontinent. With the end of the 200 years of British rule and the implementation of the 1947 Partition, the then British India got divided into two separate nations — the Muslim majority in Pakistan and a Hindu majority in India.

The Bangladesh Liberation war of 1971 resulted in East Pakistan separating from the West forming an independent Bangladesh. A country was born with very distinct cultures. Criss-crossed by thousands of large and small rivers, hills and forests, and the vast fertile land carpeted with golden crops, Bangladesh offers a picturesque landscape.

The natural beauty provides a broad context of the minds of the Bangladeshis that is culturally meaningful. We are passionate, friendly, and very hospitable. A Bangladeshi wouldn't hesitate to spend the last penny to see a smile on a guest's face. Such is the heart of the people of Bangladesh.

Multiculturalism further



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

strengthened the country and includes Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians. They have played a role in creating and shaping the rich, diverse yet unique culture of Bangladesh. Language, literature, folklore, music, tribal dances, religious and social festivities enriched the country.

Notable patriotic days Victory Day (Dec. 16) and Language Movement Day (Feb. 21) are annual observances. Religious festivities like Eid, Durga Puja, Buddha Purnima, and Christmas are celebrated with full fervour giving the country a secular identity.

Social events like the Bengali Nob Borsho (new year), Boshonta Utshob (spring festival), post-monsoon boat race festivals, Pitha Utshob (special winter food festivity) and many more in-between celebrations brought people, land, values, and faiths together. They became far more enjoyable with large feasts with a variety of delicacies, namely, the mouth-watering biryani which is a rice-meat dish, pulao, kofta, payesh, roshogolla, doi (Bangladeshi sweet yogurt) — to name a few.

Let me not forget to mention that we are called "mache bhate bangali," which comes from our love for fish with rice. The universally tasty Hilsa fish, locally called the Ilish, is the pride of the country and holds the status of the national fish. Luckily, we get to enjoy a variety of freshwater fish in Thunder Bay too.

The country got its name from the poems of Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bangladesh's national poet. Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, the most famous poet of the sub-continent, hailed Bangladesh as "amar shonar Bangla" (my golden country) in one of his poems which later became the national anthem of Bangladesh.

Music and literature continue to thrive with singers like Shahnaz Rahmatullah, the nightingale of Bangladesh, Runa Laila, Sabina Yasmine, Shubir Nandi. Some well-known literary works shared by both India's West Bengal and Bangladesh are Shesher Kabita, Debdaash, Kacher Deyal, Shatka-han, and many other masterpieces created by famous writers such as Sharat Chandra, Shomoresht Majumdar, Humayan Ahmed, and many more. Let's not forget the legendary movie stars like Uttam Kumar-Suchitra Sen, Razzak-Shabana, Babita, Bulbul Ahmed, and Humayun Faridi who will live forever in the hearts of thousands of Bangladeshis.

Thunder Bay's Bangladesh community includes bright international students and many loving families. As professionals, they contribute to health, education, research, trades, and the public and private sectors. We gather to keep our ethnicities and cultures alive through communal celebrations, food, and language. This is especially important for the emerging Canadian-Bangladeshi generations, our children and youth.

I have travelled to many places, but I am a proud Bangladeshi by birth. As a Canadian-Bangladeshi in Thunder Bay and a member of the excellent Bangladeshi community here, I invite you to learn about us in solidarity.

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